

Notes & Observations



National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

Dry Tortugas National Park
P.O. Box 6208
Key West, FL 33041

305-242-7700 phone
305-242-7766 facsimile

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior



Dry Tortugas National Park

Dry Tortugas National Park Bird Checklist



This brochure was funded by the Florida National Parks and Monuments Association in cooperation with the National Park Service. Proceeds from educational sales help make this brochure possible.

02/04

EXPERIENCE YOUR AMERICA

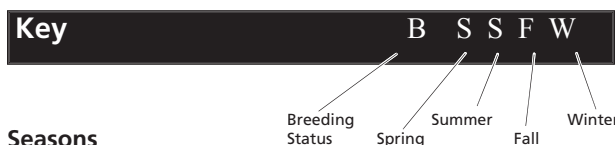
Introduction

The bird life of the Dry Tortugas has attracted the notice of visitors since Spanish explorer Ponce de Leon discovered these isolated, almost waterless islands in June 1513. After extensive military use, the area was transferred to the Department of Agriculture in 1908, and maintained as a National Wildlife Refuge. Fort Jefferson National Monument was established in 1935 to protect the nesting colonies, marine life, and historic resources. In 1992, the area was re-designated Dry Tortugas National Park.

The Dry Tortugas provide long-term habitat for few birds. Fewer than 40 species are usual in winter and only 7 nest more-or-less regularly (Masked Booby, Brown Pelican, Magnificent Frigatebird, Roseate Tern, Sooty Tern, Brown Noddy, Mourning Dove). Most birds in the area are transients or strays, present only briefly (usually during migrations), but often very numerous when they occur.

This bulletin, which includes 299 species, builds upon the work of many renowned naturalists dating back to Audubon's visit in May 1832. Dr. Bill Robertson, Jr. was instrumental in much of this work. After decades of public service, Bill and Betty Robertson are no longer with us. Both have recently passed away, but their legacy lives on. Their contributions will never be forgotten. This latest list was compiled by Sonny Bass. Please report changes or unusual sightings to: sonny_bass@nps.gov.

Key



Seasons

- S - Spring (March 1 - May 31)
- S - Summer (June 1 - July 31)
- F - Fall (August 1 - November 15)
- W - Winter (November 16 - April 30)

Abundance

- C - Commonly observed (more than 20 records per season)
- U - Uncommonly observed (11 to 20 records per season)
- R - Rarely observed (6 to 10 records per season)
- 1 through 5 - number of records per season

Breeding Status

- + - Known to breed in the park
- ? - Breeding status unknown

Seasonal Information

Spring

Scattered northbound migrants arrive as early as mid-February, and substantial migration is usual during March (especially of herons, Ibises, and some raptors and shorebirds). The flood of spring migration extends from the last days of March to about May 20, and potentially includes well over 200 species. A fair representation of migrants is likely on any day during this period, but the occurrence of major concentrations requires bad weather, typically cold front storms from the northwest accompanied by rain. Typically the worse the weather, the larger the number and diversity of grounded migrants. Also, the stronger the storm's westerly component, the greater the likelihood of rarities. After intense spring storms, normally scarce species may be common and the more usual migrants are often present in the thousands. Weather severe enough to cause major fallouts of spring migrants is more likely during April and infrequent after mid-May.

Summer

In June the tern colonies are in full cry and masses of juvenile Sooty Terns cover the Bush Key beaches. Most of the non-nesting species of waterbirds are reduced to a few individuals. Magnificent Frigatebirds, especially during windy, unsettled weather, prey to some extent on young terns. Landbirds, except the resident Mourning Doves, are scarce, but spring migration persists in a very small way through much of June. By mid-July, many terns have left the nesting colonies, and the first southbound migrants appear.

Fall

Compared to the spring migration, bird migration in the fall is more prolonged and not as obviously influenced by weather. The migration goes on from early July until late November. Large flights of raptors (especially Sharp-shinned and Broad-winged Hawks, Merlins, and Peregrine Falcons) are a feature of the September-October migration, and at times these predators seem to outnumber the small landbirds they prey upon.

Winter

Midwinter bird life consists mostly of a scant assortment of waterbirds, notably the flocks of gulls and terns that follow the fishing fleet. Landbirds are limited to a few American Kestrels and Belted Kingfishers, an occasional Gray Catbird, Yellow-rumped and Palm Warblers, and Savannah Sparrows.

Tortugas Specialties

Sooty Tern

About 80,000 nest annually on Bush Key, the only important breeding colony in the continental U.S. Outside the nesting season, they resort to the high seas and seldom approach mainland shores. Sooties are first heard in late December at night. Their numbers increase gradually until they land and begin nesting in early February. Each female produces one egg, and the male and female alternately incubate it for 29 days. They then care for the chick for 8 to 10 weeks. Their food is primarily fish and squid caught at sea surface, at times 50 miles or more away from the colony. Sooties begin to leave during June and by mid-August the colony is almost deserted. Extensive bird-banding shows that most adults spend their off-season in the eastern Caribbean, whereas young birds migrate to the eastern tropical Atlantic where they spend up to 5 years in seas off West Africa before they return to the Dry Tortugas.

Brown Noddy

About 4,500 Brown Noddies also breed on Bush Key, placing their bulky nest of seaweed and sticks in the bushes and mangrove trees. They arrive with the Sooty Terns, but tend to stay longer, sometimes as late as October. From band returns, they seem to range much less widely than Sooties, seldom leaving the Gulf-Caribbean region.

Black Noddy

First discovered at the Dry Tortugas in 1960, a few have been found in most years since then. They appear as early as late March and as late as September. Most often they are seen perched on the north coaling dock on Garden Key, or in mangroves on Bush Key. As yet, there is no evidence that they nest in the area.

Magnificent Frigatebird

Long Key contains the only current nesting colony for the Magnificent Frigatebird in the continental U.S. They first nested in this area in 1988, and may be the same population that nested for 25 years at the Marquesas Keys until driven away by human disturbance. Long Key contains approximately 100 nests.

Masked Booby

Present year-round in numbers up to about 40. Usually seen perched on buoys or roosting on the smaller islands. Since 1984, a few pairs have nested each winter/spring on Hospital and Middle Keys.

Name	B	S	S	F	W
<input type="checkbox"/> Pacific Loon (2)					
<input type="checkbox"/> Common Loon (5)		R			R
<input type="checkbox"/> Pied-billed Grebe				1	
<input type="checkbox"/> Audubon's Shearwater		3			
<input type="checkbox"/> Wilson's Storm Petrel		R	R		
<input type="checkbox"/> Band-rumped Storm-Petrel (1)		2			
<input type="checkbox"/> White-tailed Tropicbird	?	U	U	R	R
<input type="checkbox"/> Masked Booby	+	U	U	U	U
<input type="checkbox"/> Brown Booby	?	U	U	U	U
<input type="checkbox"/> Red-footed Booby		R	R	3	
<input type="checkbox"/> Northern Gannet (4)		R		R	R
<input type="checkbox"/> American White Pelican		1			1
<input type="checkbox"/> Brown Pelican	+	C	C	C	C
<input type="checkbox"/> Double-crested Cormorant		C	C	C	C
<input type="checkbox"/> Anhinga (1 in 1860)					
<input type="checkbox"/> Magnificent Frigatebird	+	C	C	C	U
<input type="checkbox"/> American Bittern (1)		3		5	
<input type="checkbox"/> Least Bittern (1)		R	1	3	
<input type="checkbox"/> Great Blue Heron		U	U	U	U
<input type="checkbox"/> Great Blue Heron (white phase)		U	U	U	U
<input type="checkbox"/> Great Egret		C	R	R	
<input type="checkbox"/> Snowy Egret		C	R	U	
<input type="checkbox"/> Little Blue Heron		C	R	U	
<input type="checkbox"/> Tricolored Heron		C	U	U	1
<input type="checkbox"/> Reddish Egret		5	4	4	2
<input type="checkbox"/> Cattle Egret		C	C	C	U
<input type="checkbox"/> Green Heron	?	C	R	C	1
<input type="checkbox"/> Black-crowned Night Heron		R	3	3	
<input type="checkbox"/> Yellow-crowned Night Heron		C	U	C	U
<input type="checkbox"/> White Ibis		U	2	R	1
<input type="checkbox"/> Glossy Ibis		R	1	4	3
<input type="checkbox"/> Roseate Spoonbill		2			
<input type="checkbox"/> Greater Flamingo			1		
<input type="checkbox"/> Fulvous Whistling Duck		2			1
<input type="checkbox"/> Snow Goose		1			3
<input type="checkbox"/> Snow Goose (blue phase)		1			3
<input type="checkbox"/> Canada Goose (1)				2	1
<input type="checkbox"/> Green-winged Teal (1)		1		2	
<input type="checkbox"/> Mallard				1	
<input type="checkbox"/> Northern Pintail		2		1	
<input type="checkbox"/> Blue-winged Teal		U		U	1
<input type="checkbox"/> Northern Shoveler (1)					
<input type="checkbox"/> Gadwall					1
<input type="checkbox"/> Ring-necked Duck		1		3	
<input type="checkbox"/> Lesser Scaup					2
<input type="checkbox"/> Common Eider (1)					
<input type="checkbox"/> Hooded Merganser					1
<input type="checkbox"/> Red-breasted Merganser (4)		R			2
<input type="checkbox"/> Turkey Vulture		4	3	2	1
<input type="checkbox"/> Osprey		C	U	U	1

Name	B	S	S	F	W
<input type="checkbox"/> American Swallow-tailed Kite		3			
<input type="checkbox"/> Northern Harrier (3)		C		U	1
<input type="checkbox"/> Sharp-shinned Hawk		C	R	C	
<input type="checkbox"/> Cooper's Hawk		4		5	
<input type="checkbox"/> Red-shouldered Hawk		R	1	1	
<input type="checkbox"/> Broad-winged Hawk		U	R	C	R
<input type="checkbox"/> Swainson's Hawk		3	3		
<input type="checkbox"/> Red-tailed Hawk		3		1	
<input type="checkbox"/> American Kestrel		C	4	C	U
<input type="checkbox"/> Merlin		C		C	
<input type="checkbox"/> Peregrine Falcon		U	3	C	4
<input type="checkbox"/> Black Rail (1)		1		1	
<input type="checkbox"/> Clapper Rail		1			1
<input type="checkbox"/> King Rail		2			
<input type="checkbox"/> Virginia Rail (2)				1	
<input type="checkbox"/> Sora		C		R	1
<input type="checkbox"/> Purple Gallinule		C	U	R	
<input type="checkbox"/> Common Moorhen (4)		?	3	2	
<input type="checkbox"/> American Coot (1)		5		2	2
<input type="checkbox"/> Limpkin (1)		4	2	1	
<input type="checkbox"/> Sandhill Crane					1
<input type="checkbox"/> Black-bellied Plover		C	U	C	C
<input type="checkbox"/> Lesser Golden Plover		U			3
<input type="checkbox"/> Wilson's Plover (2)		R	2	1	
<input type="checkbox"/> Semipalmated Plover		C	R	U	R
<input type="checkbox"/> Piping Plover		R	3	R	
<input type="checkbox"/> Killdeer		U	2	U	R
<input type="checkbox"/> American Oystercatcher		1			
<input type="checkbox"/> Black-necked Stilt		U	R		
<input type="checkbox"/> American Avocet					3
<input type="checkbox"/> Greater Yellowlegs		U		4	
<input type="checkbox"/> Lesser Yellowlegs		C		2	
<input type="checkbox"/> Solitary Sandpiper		R	1	2	
<input type="checkbox"/> Willet		U	U	U	R
<input type="checkbox"/> Spotted Sandpiper		C	R	R	
<input type="checkbox"/> Upland Sandpiper		C	1		
<input type="checkbox"/> Whimbrel		R	1	4	3
<input type="checkbox"/> Long-billed Curlew				1	
<input type="checkbox"/> Ruddy Turnstone		C	U	C	C
<input type="checkbox"/> Red Knot (1)		2			
<input type="checkbox"/> Sanderling		C	R	C	C
<input type="checkbox"/> Semipalmated Sandpiper		C	5	R	
<input type="checkbox"/> Western Sandpiper		R	1	2	
<input type="checkbox"/> Least Sandpiper		C	2	R	
<input type="checkbox"/> White-rumped Sandpiper		C	U		
<input type="checkbox"/> Baird's Sandpiper		4			
<input type="checkbox"/> Pectoral Sandpiper		R		3	
<input type="checkbox"/> Dunlin		3		1	
<input type="checkbox"/> Stilt Sandpiper		3		1	
<input type="checkbox"/> Buff-breasted Sandpiper		1			

Name	B	S	S	F	W
<input type="checkbox"/> Ruff			1		
<input type="checkbox"/> Short-billed Dowitcher		U	5	U	
<input type="checkbox"/> Long-billed Dowitcher					1
<input type="checkbox"/> Common Snipe (1)		R		3	2
<input type="checkbox"/> American Woodcock		1		2	1
<input type="checkbox"/> Wilson's Phalarope		2			
<input type="checkbox"/> Red-necked Phalarope					1
<input type="checkbox"/> Pomarine Jaeger		3		2	
<input type="checkbox"/> Parasitic Jaeger		1		1	
<input type="checkbox"/> Laughing Gull		+	C	U	C
<input type="checkbox"/> Bonaparte's Gull		2			2
<input type="checkbox"/> Ring-billed Gull		U	2	R	U
<input type="checkbox"/> Herring Gull		C	U	U	C
<input type="checkbox"/> Lesser Black-backed Gull		2			
<input type="checkbox"/> Glaucous Gull		1			
<input type="checkbox"/> Great Black-backed Gull		1	1	1	
<input type="checkbox"/> Sabine's Gull		1		1	
<input type="checkbox"/> Gull-billed Tern (1)		3	2	1	
<input type="checkbox"/> Caspian Tern		R	3	1	
<input type="checkbox"/> Royal Tern		?	C	U	C
<input type="checkbox"/> Sandwich Tern		U	R	C	U
<input type="checkbox"/> Roseate Tern		+	C	C	R
<input type="checkbox"/> Common Tern		?	R	2	3
<input type="checkbox"/> Forster's Tern		R		1	1
<input type="checkbox"/> Least Tern		+	R	R	R
<input type="checkbox"/> Bridled Tern		3	1	3	3
<input type="checkbox"/> Sooty Tern		+	C	C	U
<input type="checkbox"/> Black Tern (1)		2	2	2	1
<input type="checkbox"/> Brown Noddy		+	C	C	U
<input type="checkbox"/> Black Noddy		R	R	R	
<input type="checkbox"/> Black Skimmer		U	3	1	U
<input type="checkbox"/> Dovekie					2
<input type="checkbox"/> Rock Dove		R	R	R	R
<input type="checkbox"/> White-crowned Pigeon		4	5	4	1
<input type="checkbox"/> Eurasian Collared Dove		5	2		
<input type="checkbox"/> White-tipped Dove		1			
<input type="checkbox"/> White-winged Dove (4)		U	1	3	1
<input type="checkbox"/> Zenaida Dove		1			
<input type="checkbox"/> Mourning Dove		C	C	C	C
<input type="checkbox"/> Common Ground Dove		4	4	3	
<input type="checkbox"/> Ruddy Quail Dove					1
<input type="checkbox"/> Black-billed Cuckoo		R		R	
<input type="checkbox"/> Yellow-billed Cuckoo		C	U	C	
<input type="checkbox"/> Mangrove Cuckoo		?	4	1	
<input type="checkbox"/> Smooth-billed Ani		?	R	R	R
<input type="checkbox"/> Barn Owl		4	2		1
<input type="checkbox"/> Long-eared Owl		1			
<input type="checkbox"/> Eastern Screech Owl		1			1
<input type="checkbox"/> Burrowing Owl		R		R	4
<input type="checkbox"/> Barred Owl (1)					

Name	B	S	S	F	W
<input type="checkbox"/> Short-eared Owl		U	3		1
<input type="checkbox"/> Lesser Nighthawk		4			
<input type="checkbox"/> Common Nighthawk		C	R	C	
<input type="checkbox"/> Antillean Nighthawk		R	3	1	
<input type="checkbox"/> Chuck-will's-widow		C		R	
<input type="checkbox"/> Whip-poor-will		1		1	
<input type="checkbox"/> Black Swift			1		
<input type="checkbox"/> Chimney Swift		C	2	2	
<input type="checkbox"/> Ruby-throated Hummingbird		C	2	2	
<input type="checkbox"/> Black-chinned Hummingbird		1			
<input type="checkbox"/> Belted Kingfisher		C	R	C	U
<input type="checkbox"/> Red-headed Woodpecker		1	1		
<input type="checkbox"/> Yellow-bellied Sapsucker		C		R	
<input type="checkbox"/> Hairy Woodpecker (1)					
<input type="checkbox"/> Northern Flicker		3		1	
<input type="checkbox"/> Olive-sided Flycatcher		2			
<input type="checkbox"/> Eastern Wood Pewee		C		U	
<input type="checkbox"/> Yellow-bellied Flycatcher		4		2	
<input type="checkbox"/> Acadian Flycatcher		3		2	
<input type="checkbox"/> Least Flycatcher		2		2	
<input type="checkbox"/> Crescent-eyed Pewee		2			
<input type="checkbox"/> Black Phoebe		1			
<input type="checkbox"/> Eastern Phoebe		R		R	
<input type="checkbox"/> Great-crested Flycatcher		3		R	1
<input type="checkbox"/> La Sagra's Flycatcher		1			
<input type="checkbox"/> Variegated Flycatcher		1			
<input type="checkbox"/> "Tropical" Kingbird		2			
<input type="checkbox"/> Western Kingbird		R	1	5	
<input type="checkbox"/> Eastern Kingbird		C	4	U	
<input type="checkbox"/> Gray Kingbird		?	C	U	3
<input type="checkbox"/> Scissor-tailed Flycatcher		5		1	1
<input type="checkbox"/> Fork-tailed Flycatcher		1	1		
<input type="checkbox"/> Purple Martin		C	U	U	1
<input type="checkbox"/> Tree Swallow		C	1	R	3
<input type="checkbox"/> Bahama Swallow		2	1		
<input type="checkbox"/> Northern Rough-winged Swallow		C	2	5	1
<input type="checkbox"/> Bank Swallow		C	R	U	
<input type="checkbox"/> Cliff Swallow		C	3	R	
<input type="checkbox"/> Cave Swallow		U	3		
<input type="checkbox"/> Barn Swallow		?	C	U	C
<input type="checkbox"/> American Crow		1			
<input type="checkbox"/> Tufted Titmouse		1			
<input type="checkbox"/> House Wren		U		5	1
<input type="checkbox"/> Sedge Wren		1			
<input type="checkbox"/> Ruby-crowned Kinglet					R
<input type="checkbox"/> Blue-gray Gnatcatcher		C	1	U	
<input type="checkbox"/> Eastern Bluebird (1)					1
<input type="checkbox"/> Veery		C	1	R	
<input type="checkbox"/> Gray-cheeked Thrush		C	3	4	1
<input type="checkbox"/> Swainson's Thrush		C		U	

Name	B	S	S	F	W
<input type="checkbox"/> Hermit Thrush		1		R	
<input type="checkbox"/> Wood Thrush		C		3	
<input type="checkbox"/> American Robin		3	1	3	3
<input type="checkbox"/> Gray Catbird		C	3	U	R
<input type="checkbox"/> Northern Mockingbird		?	C	2	U
<input type="checkbox"/> Bahama Mockingbird		2			
<input type="checkbox"/> Brown Thrasher		2	1	5	
<input type="checkbox"/> American Pipit		2		4	1
<input type="checkbox"/> Cedar Waxwing		U	2		3
<input type="checkbox"/> Loggerhead Shrike					1
<input type="checkbox"/> European Starling		4		1	1
<input type="checkbox"/> White-eyed Vireo		C		5	
<input type="checkbox"/> Thick-billed Vireo		1			
<input type="checkbox"/> Blue-headed Vireo		U		2	
<input type="checkbox"/> Yellow-throated Vireo		U		4	
<input type="checkbox"/> Warbling Vireo		R			
<input type="checkbox"/> Philadelphia Vireo		R		1	
<input type="checkbox"/> Red-eyed Vireo		C	2	R	
<input type="checkbox"/> Black-whiskered Vireo		?	C	3	1
<input type="checkbox"/> Bachman's Warbler		2			
<input type="checkbox"/> Blue-winged Warbler		U		2	
<input type="checkbox"/> Golden-winged Warbler		U		4	
<input type="checkbox"/> Tennessee Warbler		C	1	3	
<input type="checkbox"/> Orange-crowned Warbler		5		2	
<input type="checkbox"/> Nashville Warbler		U		3	
<input type="checkbox"/> Northern Parula		C		C	
<input type="checkbox"/> Yellow Warbler		C	2	U	
<input type="checkbox"/> Chestnut-sided Warbler		U		R	
<input type="checkbox"/> Magnolia Warbler		C	1	U	
<input type="checkbox"/> Cape May Warbler		C	1	R	
<input type="checkbox"/> Black-throated Blue Warbler		C	2	U	
<input type="checkbox"/> Yellow-rumped Warbler		C	2	R	U
<input type="checkbox"/> Black-throated Gray Warbler				3	
<input type="checkbox"/> Townsend's Warbler		2		1	
<input type="checkbox"/> Black-throated Green Warbler		C	1	3	
<input type="checkbox"/> Blackburnian Warbler		U		4	
<input type="checkbox"/> Yellow-throated Warbler		C	2	U	
<input type="checkbox"/> Pine Warbler		2		3	
<input type="checkbox"/> Prairie Warbler		C	2	C	
<input type="checkbox"/> Palm Warbler		C	2	C	U
<input type="checkbox"/> Bay-breasted Warbler		C	2		
<input type="checkbox"/> Blackpoll Warbler		C	R	3	
<input type="checkbox"/> Cerulean Warbler		U		4	
<input type="checkbox"/> Black-and-white Warbler		C	2	C	
<input type="checkbox"/> American Redstart		C	U	C	
<input type="checkbox"/> Prothonotary Warbler		C	1	U	
<input type="checkbox"/> Worm-eating Warbler		C		R	
<input type="checkbox"/> Swainson's Warbler		R		2	
<input type="checkbox"/> Ovenbird		C	1	C	
<input type="checkbox"/> Northern Waterthrush		C		U	

Name	B	S	S	F	W
<input type="checkbox"/> Louisiana Waterthrush		U	3	4	
<input type="checkbox"/> Kentucky Warbler		U	1	4	
<input type="checkbox"/> Connecticut Warbler		U		1	
<input type="checkbox"/> Mourning Warbler		2			
<input type="checkbox"/> Common Yellowthroat		C	4	U	1
<input type="checkbox"/> Hooded Warbler		C	3	U	
<input type="checkbox"/> Wilson Warbler		3		R	
<input type="checkbox"/> Canada Warbler		R			
<input type="checkbox"/> Yellow-breasted Chat		5		2	
<input type="checkbox"/> Bananaquit		1			
<input type="checkbox"/> Western Stripe-headed Tanager		1			
<input type="checkbox"/> Summer Tanager		C	1	U	
<input type="checkbox"/> Scarlet Tanager		C		2	
<input type="checkbox"/> Western Tanager		1		1	
<input type="checkbox"/> Northern Cardinal		2			
<input type="checkbox"/> Rose-breasted Grosbeak		C	1	R	
<input type="checkbox"/> Blue Grosbeak		C		3	
<input type="checkbox"/> Indigo Bunting		C	4	R	
<input type="checkbox"/> Painted Bunting		C	5	4	
<input type="checkbox"/> Dickcissel		U			
<input type="checkbox"/> Rufous-sided Towhee					1
<input type="checkbox"/> Yellow-faced Grassquit		1			